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ABSTRACT

Described is a visit to the Fajans School in Falkenberg, Sweden, a single stream elementary school with an integrated nursery and day care center. Serving 220 children, the Fajans school does not grade according to age or ability. The nursery school provides 47 day care places, plus 18 in a part-time day nursery and 30 for children 7-12 years old who need supervision outside of school hours. Children are grouped according to "color units," each of which has a nursery department, junior class, and intermediate class. Ages in each color unit range from 9 months to 12 years. Each unit has its own team of staff, including teachers, recreation leaders, and some kitchen and cleaning staff. The school aims to create a homelike, realistic, and natural atmosphere in which children will be happy, feel secure, be self-confident, acquire self-respect, be able to collaborate, undertake responsible activities, have their strong points developed, and feel that they are at the center of attention. The report describes the school building and facilities, and how teachers and pupils work. Observations are reported and suggestions are offered concerning school climate, building and facilities, affective and psychomotor domains of development, cognitive development, and parents' involvement. It is concluded that the school had achieved its basic aim. (RH)

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Project No. 8:
"Innovation in primary education"

# The contact school plan

Visit to the Swedish contact school
Fajanskolan, Falkenberg

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION (CDCC)

Project No. 8 on
"Innovation in Primary Education"

# THE CONTACT SCHOOL PLAN

Visit to the Swedish Contact School
Fajanskolan, Falkenberg

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Contact School Plan

The establishment of the Contact School Plan was decided by the Project Group, in order to provide the members of the Group with first-hand information, regarding the innovations implemented in the various countries of Europe. Twelve schools, from twelve different countries, participated in the plan.

More specifically, the aims and objectives of the Contact School Plan, as formulated at the Malta 1984 Project Group meeting, were the following:

- To bring together schools involved in comparable types of innovation.
- To enable the Project to take into account the results of experiences.
- To "feed into" the Project the reactions of teachers, educators, and parents to the ideas and proposals resulting from the more theoretical and conceptual work of the Project.

### 1.2 Time and framework of the visit

Five members of the Project Group were assigned the responsibility to act as liaison between the Project Group and the Contact School Plan. The members of this restricted group were also assigned the responsibility of submitting evaluation reports for the various Contact Schools. My assignment, as a member of the restricted group, was to visit the Swedish and the Greek Contact Schools and submit relevant reports.

The visit to "Fajans", the Swedish Contact School, was realised during the second meeting of the Working Group on the Contact School Plan, which took place in Falkenberg in April (23-25), 1985. The actual visit to the school was organised on Wednesday 23 April, from 8.30 to 13.30.

## 2.0 FAJANS SCHOOL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

### 2.1 Fajans School

Fajans is a single stream elementary school with an integrated nursery and day-care centre. There are 220 children. There is no grading according to age or ability. The three classes at junior and three at intermediate levels are vertically integrated. The nursery school provides 47 day-care places, plus 18 in the part-time day nursery and 30 for children 7-12 years, needing supervision outside school hours.

Children at Fajans are not graded according to age. They belong, instead, to a colour unit. In each unit there is a nursery department, a junior class and an intermediate class. Ages in each colour unit range from 9 months to 12 years. Each colour unit has its own team of staff, including teachers, recreation leaders and some kitchen and cleaning staff. There is full co-operation between the staff and the children of the various units for the planning and organisation of the various school activities.

2.2 Objectives of the Project

- To create, through the staff and the design of the building, the possibilities for close contact between the nursery and primary school.

- To create a homely, realistic and natural school atmosphere where children will be happy, feel security, self-confidence and self-respect, where they will be able to collaborate and undertake responsibilities, have their strong points developed, and feel that they are at the centre of attention.

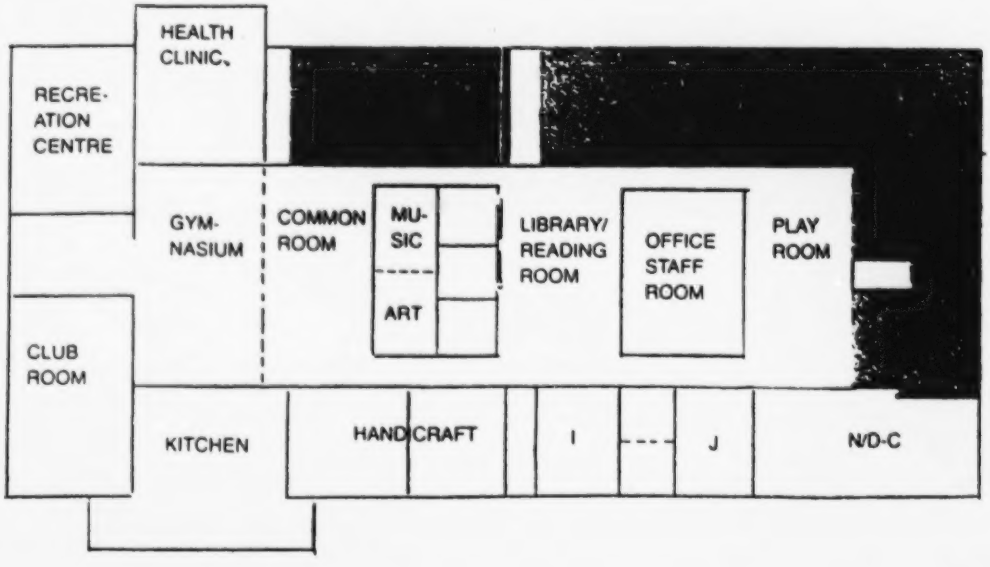
- To maintain the same groups of nursery school children on their admittance to primary school.

- To establish close contacts between Fajans school and the community.

3.0 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

3.1 The school building and facilities

Fajans school building is a very modern one. It has been designed and equipped in such a way, so as to facilitate to the maximum degree the achievement of the objectives set. The rooms, the corridors, the corners, the location of every single room, and generally every single square metre of the area help in the creation of the pursued atmosphere and possibilities. The following diagram gives a rough idea of the arrangements:



There is no dining room in the building, because it was felt that it would be a waste of money and space to have a large area, to be used only for one hour each day. Instead, the children eat in their classrooms and the money and space for the dining room have been given for larger working accommodation and special art and music rooms.

To facilitate flexibility and free movement of pupils in the classrooms there are no fixed blackboards on certain places, but small mobile ones, which can easily be hung around the room. Also, we do not find the conventional pupils' desks in Fajans classrooms but large tables of normal height. The pupils use chairs which can be individually adjusted.

The teacher has a work area with a desk and a bookcase. In each classroom there is a cosy reading area with comfortable chairs and ample bookshelves for working materials. Between each junior and intermediate classroom there is a large area where pupils can work in small groups and even carry out simple experiments.

3.2 How teachers and pupils work

The key concepts in the working methods of both teachers and pupils are collaboration and responsibility. Teachers collaborate in regular planning meetings (parallel grades: once a week, combined grades: once a fortnight, colour: once a month), in assigning responsibility in practical subjects according to interests, an in arranging the direct teacher-pupil contact with small groups of pupils, while the remainder of the class works under the supervision of other personnel.

Pupils collaborate across "school borders" working on practical themes. Also classes from the main school work together with the nursery school to organise various activities, such as traffic training, woodland paths, story times, etc.

Teachers and pupils undertake various responsibilities in the school. It is not a matter of imposition but a matter of undertaking the various responsibilities through the free will of each individual. So we find pupils participating in the pupil council, undertaking various practical duties, such as: helping during meal-time, taking care of indoor plants and animals, helping in the library, gardening, etc.

As it was mentioned earlier, the three classes at each level are vertically integrated. There are children from three grades in one class. At the beginning of each school year, ten new pupils replace the old ones. Thus, no teacher is faced with the problem of having 30 new pupils every third year.

Closing this part, it is underlined that the basic innovations in the whole project are the integration of nursery and primary school, the integration of ages (vertical grouping, children from three grades in each class) and the emphasis on the social/emotional development of the children. And as it is put by the school: "Our aim is that at Fajans we can create a school where people and not regulations are at the core. Where the needs and development of the children are seen as essential".

## 4.0 OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### 4.1 School climate

The warmth, openness, friendliness, politeness, acceptance, and hospitality at Fajans school are something which impress the visitor from the very first moment. The relaxed atmosphere allows for freedom of movement, freedom of exchange of ideas. Everybody can be him/herself without fear, pressure or pretending. Everybody tries to help each other and everybody tries to benefit from the association of each other. The positive thinking, the positive attitude, the maximisation of potential are some of the main characteristics of Fajans school climate.

Although there are adults from various backgrounds and interests (teachers, recreation instructors, nursery school staff) working together - an arrangement which usually is not problem-free - the co-operation and pleasant climate are kept on very high levels.

This wonderful atmosphere is the result of the collective and collaborative spirit of everybody working in the school. But it is also obvious that the headteacher's (Uno Tuvesson) role in the creation of this climate has been very significant. The kind of leadership provided by Uno led to this wonderful climate, which is an essential prerequisite for the success of the project.

### 4.2 School building and equipment

In every organisation people are the most important factor. But buildings and facilities play a very important role, too. Fajans school, as it was mentioned earlier, has been so carefully designed and equipped that it creates the necessary openness and opportunities for free movement and creative activities. The richness of space and materials encourages the development of various skills, so necessary for every individual.

### 4.3 Affective and psychomotor domains

The wonderful school atmosphere, organisation, and positive philosophy of the staff are creating the necessary conditions for the development of the proper values, attitudes and interests by the children. There is no doubt that the results in the social/emotional development of the children are very positive and rewarding. This is a very quick generalisation, of course, but it can be supported by evidence, in every contact one has with the children of the school.

The same very positive impressions were formed regarding the psychomotor domain. The abundance of materials and equipment and the opportunities for practical work guarantee the unfolding of the children's creative capabilities and the development of high level skills.

### 4.4 Cognitive domain

We have seen children's work in Swedish, mathematics, science and social studies. Children are encouraged to plan and implement their own programme and proceed at their own pace. The individuality of each pupil is respected.

It seemed to some of us who visited the school that this area could be strengthened somehow. By this we do not mean that we should go back to memorisation, dry knowledge and inert ideas. We just mean that, in spite of the endless area covered by what is called cognitive domain, we can identify certain things in this domain which children should learn at the proper stage of development, and that the adequate time and adequate guidance from the teacher should be given for this learning. Continuous free activities (sometimes for activities' sake) are not always constructive and the right thing to be done. There are times when certain structured activities are necessary in pursuing objectives in the cognitive domain.

4.5 Parents' involvement

Another strong aspect of Fajans school is the interest demonstrated by the parents and their involvement in the school activities. The established open communications between staff and parents facilitates co-operation and exchange of ideas, factors essential for the children's development and progress.

5.0 EPILOGUE

The pupils, the Principal, the staff, the parents, and the authorities should be proud of Fajans school. Their dream to create a school where children of all ages are happy, friendly, responsible, and the centre of attention is now a reality. And this is because of the enthusiasm, the devotion, the genuine interest and the collaborative spirit of all people involved.

Special congratulations go to Uno for his superb leadership. Finally, warm thanks are extended to Uno, the staff, and the children for the wonderful hospitality which was offered to us during the visit to their school.